

# PRAGMATIC INQUIRY IN BUSINESS ETHICS: SYNTHESIZING BUSINESS AND VOCATION IN SERVICE OF THE COMMON GOOD

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## I. Thesis / Purpose

Teaching business ethics at a Catholic University poses unique challenges. Beyond employing Catholic social teaching to examine case studies in a syllogistic and deductive fashion to arrive at a particular conclusion, there seems to be other responsibilities if the anthropology of theologians like Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan are taken seriously. For Rahner, “formal existential ethics” is much more than a syllogistic and deductive application of first principles to particular cases. For this reason, he argues that ethics “has yet to catch up to the [Spiritual] Exercises [of Saint Ignatius Loyola].” For Lonergan, ethics must be seen in the context of the transcendental precepts, that is, the authentic unfolding of conscious intentionality. He argues that moral responsibility means being attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible, and *in love*. In this context, teaching business ethics must also assist students discern their own *vocation* to business, their own fundamental option, so they are able to allocate their limited resources in response to their own sense of ultimate meaning. This notion of ethics, however, is a radical departure from or addition to the syllogistic, deductive mode of ethics that has been popularized by the case study method.

Furthermore, if the missions of Catholic Universities are also taken seriously, they must somehow integrate mission-oriented values into the curriculum and the classroom. At DePaul University, for example, the second strategic goal of Vision 2012 is to “prepare students to be socially responsible future leaders and engaged alumni” (<http://vision2012.depaul.edu/>). DePaul’s motto, “Viam sapientiae monstrabo tibi” (“I will show you the way to wisdom”) raises challenging questions for the teacher of business ethics. Does exposing students to a variety of ethical methods help shape socially responsible leaders? Does it help them discover “the way to wisdom”? What prepares students for leadership that is socially responsible? In theological language, how can business be seen in the context of a vocation to serve the Common Good, not just one’s own immediate, self-referential interests?

The Pragmatic Inquiry® method developed by Corporantes, inc., is a practical curricular model for discernment and the appropriation of mission-based values into business ethics. By establishing exercises for critical self-reflection and socio-environmental analysis, The *Pathfinder* Notebook guides students through a process of self-discovery *and* social analysis, a process that closely mirrors the spiritual and intellectual heritage of the Catholic Tradition.

When business education is rooted in critical self-reflection, it becomes a form of “spiritual exercise.” Saint Ignatius Loyola writes that spiritual exercises, “having as their purpose the overcoming of self and the ordering of one’s life on the basis of a decision made in freedom from any disordered attachment” (Annotation 21). Critical self-reflection and self-appropriation have deep roots in Catholic spirituality, constituting a necessary starting point for fostering habits of critical self-examination and self-appropriation. In addition to critical self-awareness, however,

business ethics education must ask students to understand and imagine the socio-environmental consequences of the particular business practices that they are, or will be, engaged in. When the moral imagination is engaged, students may discover that sacred nexus between one's deepest desires and the world's great hungers, that is, their vocation to the practice of business.

The Pragmatic Inquiry® method has three contexts depending on the particular focus of the course. A particular course might engage in a personal value inquiry where students discern vocation questions, an organizational value inquiry where a group focuses on mission and identity, or a market planning inquiry, where students address a particular problem in a particular industry. In each instance, the learning activities and outcomes are fundamentally the same:

(1) Students articulate their primary “question” or “concern” in a context of *critical self-reflection*;

(2) Through a process of critical self-examination and discernment, students identify and articulate the *underlying values* that have shaped, do shape, and will continue to shape their decisions and actions;

(3) Students examine the ways in which their primary question operates in a *network of relationships*, personal, organizational, social, and environmental;

and (4) Students identify a *particular course of action* that best reflects the ways in which their personal values and the values of the organizations in which they operate respond to a clearly defined need, or market.

As a process of discernment, the particular learning outcomes of the Pragmatic Inquiry® method position students for values-based socially responsible leadership.

By engaging in critical self-reflection, values clarification, social analysis, discernment, and action planning, the Pragmatic Inquiry® method mirrors the Purgative – Illuminative – Unitive structure that many Catholic mystics espouse. Because of this foundation of *authentic subjectivity*, it comes as no surprise that the principles of Catholic social teaching are often reflected in contemporary discussions of sustainability and “creative capitalism.”

## II. Outline of Roundtable Session

***Part One: Confessions of a Business Ethics Teacher.*** Scott Kelley will share his experience of the “performative self-contradiction” of writing a dissertation on Bernard Lonergan and the Spiritual Exercises while teaching the case study method in a business ethics classroom. The Pathfinder provided a framework to teach authentically in light of a commitment to Catholic Theology.

***Part Two: What is Pragmatic Inquiry?*** In this portion of the roundtable Ron Nahser will introduce the Pragmatic Inquiry method and particular case studies that demonstrate its usefulness as “strategic planning for the individual as well as for the corporation” (Carolyn Woo,

Dean of Mendoza College of Business, University of Notre Dame). Ron will also explain why it has been embraced by many of the top MBA programs in the country.

***Part Three: What evidence supports the claim that Pragmatic Inquiry is an effective tool for teaching ethics?*** Jack Ruhe will share the results of his study that examined the impact of using Pragmatic Inquiry at Saint Mary's College using the Maccoby survey for measuring outcome achievement in character traits of compassion, generosity, critical of authority, openness, and pleasure in learning.